WelfSOC focus groups Slovenia – report

Tatjana Rakar, Urban Boljka in Maša Filipovič Hrast

The focus groups in Slovenia took place on three days (from Tuesday 11th of October to Thursday 13th of October) in the offices of the Aragon agency which was contracted for this work. The recruitment was based on the common criteria agreed by the research team. The participants socio-demographic data is provided in Table 2. Based on the screening criteria and additional open questions a selection of participants was made. Each focus group lasted for two hours without a break and was moderated by the same moderator. The participants sat around a block table with the moderator at the top; snacks and beverages were provided. All sessions were audio and video recorded and the transcripts in English with the identification of participants will be provided by Aragon agency. For each group one researcher was present Tatjana Rakar, Maša Filipovič Hrast and Urban Boljka. The five groups were scheduled as follows:

Date	Time	Focus group	No. of participants
11 October	5 - 7 pm	Women with care responsibilities	9
11 October	7.15 - 9.15 pm	Young adults	9
12 October	3 - 5 pm	Retired people	9
12 October	5.30 - 7.30 pm	Middle class	9
13 October	5 - 7 pm	Working class	8

Introduction and warm-up exercise

Moderator greeted the participants, introduced the main theme, explained the work flow and communication rules. This was followed by participants stating their names and explaining what welfare state means to them and give associations in regard to the term "welfare state", each participant had one minute for this. This introductory exercise worked very well and a broad range of welfare issues were mentioned by the participants in line with the definition of the welfare state, which the moderator read afterwards and participants were given the opportunity to raise questions. The introduction and warm-up exercise altogether lasted around 15 minutes.

Vignettes

The moderator introduced the six vignettes as described in the focus group specifications. As agreed vignettes were broad and no names were specified in order to enable the participants to frame the discussion and introduce criteria for access to benefits and services. When participants asked for further specification of the characteristics of persons in the vignettes the moderator returned to the question whether and what would make a difference in order

to be eligible for benefits and services. Each vignette was written on a paper (size A4) and placed on a board to be seen by all. The vignettes were always in the agreed order:

- An unemployed person of working age in good health;
- A person aged 70 in good health
- A family on average wages with children under 3 in good health;
- A low-income worker on minimum wage (with monthly income of 500 Euro net);
- A comfortably-off worker (with monthly income of 1500 Euro net);
- An immigrant.

Each vignette was discussed for 15 minutes (90 minutes in total). The discussion of each vignette was similarly framed according to the focus groups guidelines.

In the next section short summaries of the focus groups are presented.

FG 1: Women with care responsibilities

In this group the introductory discussion about the welfare state evolved around the issue of the abuse of the welfare state, also due to occasional dominance in the discussion of participant no. 1. The fact that the first vignette discussed was an unemployed person influenced further discussion in the group, since the issue of unemployed was a frequent topic of discussion. In general, it was hard to focus in the discussion on a concrete person on the vignette, hence, the discussion was often more broad about the welfare state issues in general. A lot of time was dedicated to what are the actual entitlements of the persons on vignettes (the participants were informing each other on particular rights, benefits and services), rather than discussing what these persons should be entitled to, hence, a very tight timing for specific vignette did not allow a more elaborated discussion on the deservingness. Overall, the group dynamic was good, all the women participated in the discussion, with occasional dominance of the participant no. 1, who often framed the discussion around the issue of abuse of the welfare state. The discussion was frequently based on personal experiences. Women were in general very critical toward the entitlements for benefits and services for the non-working mothers, however, not all agreed on this. Contrary, they all had very egalitarian views on the rights of immigrants.

Although firstly the participants found it hard to compare such broad vignettes without adding specific characteristics to the persons, the collective exercise worked well and the participants agreed on the following order of deservingness:

1. Low-income worker on minimum wage (because he works and it is not his fault that his is on minimum wage and there are frequent abuses of low-income workers);

2. Person aged 70 in good health (if he is on minimum pension);

3. Family on average wages with children under 3 in good health (children are important; supposing that the family has an unsolved housing issue)

4. Immigrant and an unemployed (nobody contributes but they receive benefits)

2

5. Comfortably-off worker (ha can survive on his own); Person aged 70 in good health (if he has higher pension around 700-800 Euro net per month).

FG 2: Young adults

The discussion in this group was very lively. At the beginning two participants dominated the discussion but with the introduction of vignettes all participants got the chance to express their opinions and views on all issues raised. The introductory debate started with participants' predominant view of the welfare state as a safety net for the most vulnerable social groups. Relatively low level of knowledge on welfare state, its services and general functions might have influenced the group dynamic. As a consequence, a lot of anecdotal experiences were shared providing for the commonly shared relatively negative attitudes towards the welfare state. This attitude can be linked to prevailing topics of the discussion that followed − how to ensure the fairness of the system especially in the light of the predominant view of the group that the system is being exploited by the "non-deserving". It is not surprising that the activation principle which should be (as the group almost unanimously expressed) put at the heart of social intervention. As a result of that social rights should be made conditional and dependant on activation and personal behaviour. This view was predominant but not shared by all participants, although the common rule for entitlement seems to be; the more the person is (or has been active and has participated to the society), more entitled he or she is.

Another interesting observation is that the attitudes of the participants towards different aspects of the welfare state did not (speaking in general) follow expected strict left-right/liberal-conservative divide and positioning in the political spectrum, but were rather based on particular context and hypothetical situations/scenarios of each individual vignette.

The last exercise (deciding on the order of deservingness) took participants a long time. They complained there were too many unknown factors that could influence the order. However, comfortably-off worker was put on the last spot, an unemployed worker on the first (condition: activation, willingness to find paid work). Interestingly enough, the immigrant (they had a refugee in mind) was competing for the first spot (condition: activation, willingness to work and stay in Slovenia) as being the most vulnerable and in need. Factors influencing the decision: paid work, willingness to work, activation, children.

Order of deservingness:

1. Unemployed (condition: activation, willingness to find paid work)

2. /3. /4. / 5 (unclear position of vignettes, immigrant (refugee) competing for 1st place (condition: activation, willingness to work and stay in Slovenia)

6. comfortably-off worker

FG 3: Retired people

In general discussion was very lively, people were very active and all participated in the discussion except one woman was very quiet and did not have any opinion. Especially in the beginning male participants dominated discussion, but later on also women voiced quite strongly their opinions. In the first task the definition of the welfare state the discussion digressed from the topic also toward political issues, but later on things seemed to function well. The participants emphasised that the state is responsible for the poverty of the elderly. Overall, the group was more keen on discussing the issues and solutions of the welfare state problems rather than the issues of benefits and services for particular groups of people. Some part of discussion related to the inefficient administration and non-functioning institutions such as the Employment agency.

As a source of argument they often referred to personal experiences, foreign countries and the media. When the vignette on immigrant was introduced the first reaction was somewhat negative, people seemed a bit displeased or concerned to talk about it, but later on expressed quite egalitarian views.

The last exercise worked well, and the ranking was made by adding specific explanations of the characteristics of the discussed groups of people (e.g. in regard to the unemployed it is important whether he/she accepts any kind work or rejects it and if he/she is capable to work; regarding well payed worker they demanded explanations, since they cannot compare in general, and the ranking depends on family status of this worker).

On the basis of discussion, the following collective ranking of the deservingness of different groups of people was made:

1. Family on average wages with children under 3 in good health (this was the only group that put family on the first place)
2. Low-income worker on minimum wage
3. Unemployed (however, if he/she is not willing to work should be placed on the last place)
4. Comfortably-off worker (however, if he has a family should be placed on the 3rd place)
5. Person aged 70 in good health
6. Immigrant (he is entitled to minimum of the benefits and services)

FG 4: Middle class

The discussion in this group was generally very well informed and you could clearly notice that the majority of participants had higher education. Interestingly, the issue of universal basic income dominated the discussion. It was hard to focus the debate on the specific characteristics of the persons on the vignettes, since the discussion on universal basic income dominated the discussion and with its introduction there would be no differences among the people in the entitlements for benefits. There was a lot of discussion on how universal basic income should be implemented, what would additional benefits be and whether there should be any additional benefits besides the universal basic income. The moderator frequently had to stop the discussion on universal basic income, however, the issue kept coming up in all the topics, occasionally as a solution to welfare state problems.

Overall, the group dynamics was good, all the participants were involved in the discussion, the source of arguments were often personal experiences, especially the participant no. 9 frequently referred to his personal experiences, however, some of his arguments were a bit out of the subject of discussion. Some of the participants were very well informed about the universal basic income. Also in this group, due to time limits, it was hard to include all the topics within the discussion. In regard to the vignette of an immigrant it should be mentioned that firstly all the participant had very egalitarian views on the immigrants' rights towards benefits and services, however, during the discussion some negative attitudes were expressed, such as for example one of the participants mentioned that Muslims should not be allowed to pray during the working hours.

The last exercise on ranking the vignettes according to the deservingness criteria worked well. The participants collectively decided on the following order:

1. Unemployed person of working age in good health
2. Low-income worker on minimum wage
3. Family on average wages with children under 3 in good health
4. Immigrant and person aged 70 in good health
5. Comfortably-off worker

FG 5: Working class

The focus group functioned well with the exception of participants talking simultaneously from time to time. The welfare state as the topic seem to be familiar to them, they all had relatively well developed views on particular issues and seemed to know the welfare state general role and its services rather well. The discussion initially focused on their ideas of what the welfare state's role in society should be, what it used to be and who should be entitled to certain social rights. The predominant idea again (as with the group young adults) has been on the questionable fairness of the welfare state but not on the general principle level but more on the mezzo administrative incapability to install control mechanisms, which would prevent abuse of the system.

The discussion had (due to limited time for each vignette) not been particularly elaborate. In each vignette the topics steered towards the notion of deservingness, willingness to work and participate in the society in general regardless of questions put forward by the moderator.

In the last exercise the participants decided on the ranking rather quickly. The ranking:

1. unemployed (but only if he is willing to accept any job and is active)

2. low-income worker on minimum wage (because he works hard)

2. person aged 70 in good health;

3. family on average wages with children under 3 in good health (children are important, however people should have only as many children as they can afford),

4. comfortably-off worker (ha can survive on his own);

5. immigrants (perceived in general as free riders, especially when discussing refugees).

Interestingly, the group wanted to place the unemployed in the last place, even behind the immigrant/refugee, if he/she is a "free rider". Furthermore, the fluidity of values and personal experiences played an important role in decisions on entitlements. A participant can in one breath advocate for lower (or no taxes) and for universal and free welfare state services. The discourse on conditionality of social rights has been the harshest when it comes to immigrant/refugee.

The factors influencing the ranking have been: paid work, paying taxes, citizenship, children, nationality, ambitions, motivation to find work.

Card-sorting exercise

Each focus group concluded with a 15-minute card-sorting exercise. Participants were asked to sort the 6 vignettes in order of deservingness for the welfare state benefits and services and where possible (based on time), to justify why some categories deserve more than others (the data on collective card-sorting is described in the description of focus groups). Additionally, we asked the participants to rank them individually and provide a short explanation and write it on a paper together with their ID number. The results of card-ranking per participant are provided in Table 1. Only for the FG 1: Women with care responsibilities these results are missing, since we only introduced individual card ranking besides the groups sorting exercise after the first focus group. Additionally, during the focus groups and at the end of discussion the participants were encouraged to put their thoughts and comments in the box of thoughts.

Table 1: Card-ranking results per participant

FGD	ID in the group	POSITION 1	POSITION 2	POSITION 3	POSITION 4	POSITION 5	POSITION 6
2 - younger people	**1**	unemployed	retiree	family	low-income	well-off	immigrant
	2	unemployed	immigrant	retiree	low-income	family	well-off
	3	unemployed	*family & retiree*	*family & retiree*	low-income	well-off	immigrant
	4	unemployed	immigrant	family	low-income	retiree	well-off
	5	immigrant	unemployed	family	low-income	retiree	well-off
	6	unemployed	retiree	family	low-income	immigrant	well-off
	7	unemployed	immigrant	low-income	family	retiree	well-off
	8	unemployed	retiree	family	low-income	well-off	immigrant
	9	unemployed	retiree	immigrant	family	low-income	well-off
3 - retirees	**1**	family	low-income	well-off	unemployed	retiree	immigrant
	2	family	low-income	well-off	unemployed	retiree	immigrant

	3	family	low-income	well-off	unemployed	retiree	immigrant
	4	family	unemployed	low-income	retiree	immigrant	well-off
	5	family	unemployed	low-income	well-off	retiree	immigrant
	6	family	low-income	well-off	unemployed	retiree	immigrant
	7	family	low-income	well-off	unemployed	retiree	immigrant
	8	family	low-income	well-off	retiree	unemployed	immigrant
	9	retiree	family	low-income	well-off	unemployed	immigrant
4 - middle class	1	immigrant	unemployed	retiree	low-income	family	well-off
	2	retiree	unemployed	immigrant	low-income	family	well-off
	3	immigrant	unemployed	retiree	low-income	family	well-off
	4	immigrant	unemployed	retiree	low-income	family	well-off
	5	unemployed	immigrant	retiree	low-income	family	well-off
	6	family	unemployed	low-income	retiree	immigrant	well-off
	7	unemployed	immigrant	low-income	family	retiree	well-off
	8	family	retiree	low-income	unemployed	immigrant	well-off
	9	unemployed	family	immigrant	retiree	low-income	well-off
5 - working class	1	low-income	retiree	family	well-off	unemployed	immigrant
	2	unemployed	low-income	retiree	family	well-off	immigrant
	3	unemployed	low-income	retiree	family	immigrant	well-off
	5	unemployed	low-income	retiree	?	?	?
	6	unemployed	low-income	retiree	family	immigrant	well-off
	7	unemployed	low-income	retiree	family	well-off	immigrant
	8	unemployed	low-income	retiree	family	well-off	immigrant
	9	unemployed	low-income	retiree	family	well-off	immigrant

Table 2: Participants' socio-demographic data

FGD	ID	Gender	Age	Educational level	Profession	Job status	Left - right	Provide help and care to your or partner's parents / grandparents?	Household - net income	No. of children living in household
1 - employed women	1	female	35	ISCED 3.1	financial consultant	working full time	middle	yes, occasionally (once or several times a month)	3101 or more €	
	2	female	43	ISCED 5	worker	working full time	middle	yes, occasionally (once or several times a month)	1001 - 1300 €	2
	3	female	34	ISCED 3.1	security guard	working full time	I don't care about politics	yes, occasionally (once or several times a month)	1601 - 1900 €	1
	4	female	41	ISCED 6	administrator	working full time	left	no	2201 - 2500 €	1
	5	female	42	ISCED 6	teacher	working full time	right	no	2501 - 3100 €	3
	6	female	49	ISCED 3.1	administrator	working full time	middle	yes, occasionally (once or several times a month)	1601 - 1900 €	2
	7	female	52	ISCED 6	teacher	working full time	middle	yes, occasionally (once or several times a month)	2201 - 2500 €	2
	8	female	34	ISCED 7	pharmacist	working full time	right	no	2201 - 2500 €	2
	9	female	54	ISCED 5	accountant	working part time	left	yes, occasionally (once or several times a month)	2201 - 2500 €	2
2 - younger people	1	male	35	ISCED 6	designer	working full time	right		1601 - 1900 €	
	2	female	30	ISCED 6		self-employed	left	no	1301 - 1600 €	
	3	female	26	ISCED 6	youth worker	working full time	left	no	801 - 1000 €	
	4	male	19	ISCED 3.1		student	I don't care about politics		1601 - 1900 €	

	5	male	31	ISCED 3.1		student	left		1001 - 1300 €	
	6	female	30	ISCED 3.1		unemployed	I don't care about politics	no	1601 - 1900 €	
	7	female	28	ISCED 3.1		unemployed	middle	yes, often (weekly)	1301 - 1600 €	1
	8	male	33	ISCED 6	nurse	working full time	right		2201 - 2500 €	2
	9	female	27	ISCED 6	administrator	working full time	right	no	1001 - 1300 €	2
3 - retirees	1	male	63	ISCED 2		retired	left		551 - 800 €	
	2	female	66	ISCED 3.2		retired	right	no	up to 550 €	
	3	male	64	ISCED 2		retired	I don't care about politics		up to 550 €	
	4	female	64	ISCED 3.1		retired	middle	no	551 - 800 €	
	5	female	63	ISCED 5		retired	left	yes, regularly (daily)	up to 550 €	
	6	male	70	ISCED 3.2		retired	middle		1301 - 1600 €	
	7	female	65	ISCED 3.1		retired	right	no	1301 - 1600 €	
	8	male	69	ISCED 6		retired	left		1601 - 1900 €	
	9	male	68	ISCED 3.2		retired	middle		1001 - 1300 €	
4 - middle class	1	male	43	ISCED 6	manager	working full time	left		1001 - 1300 €	1
	2	female	50	ISCED 6	resolving complaints	working full time	left	yes, occasionally (once or several times a month)	1901 - 2200 €	3
	3	female	33	ISCED 6	IT	working full time	middle	yes, occasionally (once or several times a month)	1901 - 2200 €	
	4	female	32	ISCED 6.3, 7, 8	administration	working full time	middle	yes, occasionally (once or several times a month)	1001 - 1300 €	
	5	female	39	ISCED 6	public servant	working full time	middle	no	1301 - 1600 €	3

	6	male	39	ISCED 6	public administration	working full time	right		1901 - 2200 €	2
	7	male	33	ISCED 6	IT	working full time	right		1601 - 1900 €	2
	8	female	51	ISCED 6	bank accountant	working full time	right	yes, often (weekly)	2201 - 2500 €	
	9	male	40	ISCED 6	technical co-worker in veterinary medicine	working full time	middle		2201 - 2500 €	1
5 - working class	1	male	38	ISCED 3.1	translator, copy-writing	working full time	middle		801 - 1000 €	
	2	female	27	ISCED 3.1		self-employed	left	yes, often (weekly)	551 - 800 €	
	3	male	43	ISCED 3.2	dealer, market programme	working full time	left		551 - 800 €	
	5	female	54	ISCED 3.1	commercial officer	working full time	left	no	551 - 800 €	
	6	male	48	ISCED 3.1	salesman	working full time	middle		551 - 800 €	
	7	male	57	ISCED 3.2		unemployed	right		up to 550 €	
	8	male	31	ISCED 3.1	administrator	working full time	I don't care about politics		801 - 1000 €	1
	9	male	32	ISCED 3.2	engineer/machinist	working full time	middle		551 - 800 €	